

**Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Diversity**

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**Abstract**

The purposes of this research are to explore how currently assessed diversity knowledge, diversity skills, and diversity dispositions of pre-service teachers (PST) relate to each other and further to surmise if the presence of diversity knowledge, diversity skills, and diversity dispositions manifests in cultural efficacy and a general cultural consciousness among PST. This research suggests a reconsideration of currently used dispositions may be necessary

### **Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Diversity**

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which requires schools of education to use evidence to demonstrate that teacher candidates are gaining the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to have a positive impact on P-12 learning. Our School of Education has established nine goals for education candidates based on the NCATE mandate and the Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI) Standards. Pertinent to this research on diversity our goal three states:

Candidates differentiate instruction with respect for individual characteristics. As to *knowledge* candidates identify strategies for differentiating instruction based on student differences, as to *skills* candidates design instruction that incorporates characteristics of the local community's culture and that is appropriate to students' individual and special needs, and as to dispositions, candidates appreciate multiple perspectives and value individual differences (University of Alaska Southeast, 2011).

#### **Knowledge**

While content knowledge is important and necessary, content knowledge of a particular subject area, in and of itself, does not lead to good teaching. Dewey (1902) first posited the idea that teachers possess a special body of professional knowledge comprised of knowledge that is specific to the content being taught, general pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of human development as applied to teaching. Shulman (1985) developed the concept of pedagogical content knowledge; a blending of the content and pedagogy knowledge bases; it represents an understanding of how knowledge of content is organized, adapted, and presented for instruction.

#### **Skills**

Content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are mere concepts unless they are applied to teaching and learning. The application of knowledge and theory are the skills of teaching. Skilled teachers apply content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and effective strategies to facilitate student academic achievement. They develop and maintain a positive climate in the classroom to create a safe and engaging learning environment. They apply educational psychological theories to motivate and engage students and to analyze and evaluate individual learning needs.

### **Dispositions**

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher accreditation (NCATE) and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support consortium (INTASC) require teacher preparation programs to assess the dispositions of their teacher candidates. These organizations believe teacher dispositions play as crucial a role in teacher quality and effectiveness as do pedagogical and content knowledge/skills (Wasicsko, 2002). According to the NCATE (2006), dispositions are values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence a teacher's behavior toward his/her students, families, colleagues, and communities. The dispositions affect student learning, student motivation, and student development. They also impact an educator's own professional growth.

Despite all the emphasis on dispositions, teacher educators believe that dispositions are a vague construct that is hard to define and assess (Singh, 2008). Wasicsko (2002) maintains that dispositions are attitudes and/or beliefs that that lie inside us and are not available for direct assessment or modification. Richardson and Onwuegbuzie (2003) maintain that dispositions represent the ways in which an individual has stocked, structured, and ordered his/her psyche or mind yet Maylone (2002) warns against specifically identifying and teaching teacher dispositions

because of the risk of creating cookie-cutter educators. Dispositions may also be based on cultural norms that reflect mainly white, middle class values and may not include dispositions toward diversity.

A review of research by Rilke & Sharpe (2008) identified over 25 dispositions believed to be appropriate for teaching. These traits, attitudes, values, and beliefs include fairness, being democratic, empathy, enthusiasm, thoughtfulness and respectfulness. Research demonstrates a high correlation exists among educator's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards students of other cultures, their knowledge and application of cultural awareness information, and diverse students' successful academic performance (Banks, 1987; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). However, the assessments of vague dispositions that may immutable and may not relate to positive attitudes toward diversity are used as a gatekeeper to the teaching profession.

### **Purpose**

The purposes of this research are to explore how currently assessed diversity knowledge, diversity skills, and diversity dispositions of pre-service teachers (PST) relate to each other and further to surmise if the presence of diversity knowledge, diversity skills, and diversity dispositions manifests in cultural efficacy and a general cultural consciousness among PST.

### **Framework**

This study has three theoretical points of reference:

- A high correlation exists among educator's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards students of other cultures, their knowledge, and application of cultural awareness information, and diverse students' successful academic performance (Banks, 1987; Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Gay, 2004; Irvine, 2003; and Lee, 2004).

- Teachers' pedagogical practices impact the achievement gap (Sleeter, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Zeichner, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999)
- Effective educators in diverse settings have been found to exhibit high levels of cultural sensitivity. Their cultural sensitivity is exhibited by the modified curriculum and instructional designs that they implement (Campbell & Farrell, 1985; Cruickshank, 1986)

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants are a cohort of PST enrolled in a one year Master's level teaching preparation program. All participants are white, middle-class, females ranging in age from 26 to 42.

### **Diversity Knowledge**

PST design and submit a two week integrated unit plan as part of their education internship and curriculum development courses. The unit is assessed with the Unit Rubric that reads:

differentiation is elegant and seamless in instruction and clearly present in all lessons where needed and instructional approaches are inclusive for differing learning styles, intelligences, cultural differences, etc. The Unit Rubric has three possible score outcomes from 1-6 in three assessment categories, 'not met', 'met', and 'exceeds'.

The Unit Rubric is driven by the School of Education Goal 3:

teachers differentiate instruction with respect for individual and cultural characteristics. They identify strategies for differentiating instruction based on student differences, they design instruction that incorporates characteristics of the local community's culture and is

appropriate to students' individual and special needs, they apply local and Alaska knowledge to the selection of instructional materials and resources, and they appreciate multiple perspectives and value individual difference.

The School of Education Goal 3 is informed by the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools, Cultural Standards for Educators (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998):

Culturally responsive educators- incorporate local ways of knowing and teaching in their work and use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students

and the Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI) Standard 3.2 (Association for Childhood Education International, 2007):

candidates understand how elementary students differ in their development and approaches to learning, and create instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse students.

### **Diversity Skill**

PST are observed delivering their integrated unit during their four-week teaching residency and assessed using the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000). The SIOP is a research-based observation instrument shown to be valid and reliable in measuring high quality sheltered instruction (Guarino, Echevarria, Short, Schick, Forbes, & Rueda, 2001). Larke (1990) found that, overall, PST are willing to make accommodation for diverse students in their teaching methods and materials and to modify communication.

Diversity skill is measured by the eight interrelated SIOP components:

## Knowledge, Skills, and, Dispositions for Diversity

- Preparation (six items) — determining the lesson objectives and content objectives, selecting age-appropriate content concepts and vocabulary, and assembling supplementary materials to contextualize their lesson;
- Instruction (20 items) — emphasizing the instructional practices that are critical for English language learners, such as making connections with students' background experiences and prior learning, modulating teacher speech, emphasizing vocabulary development, using multimodal techniques, promoting higher-order thinking skills, grouping students appropriately for language and content development and providing hands-on materials, and
- Review/Assessment (four items) — conducting informal assessment of student comprehension and learning of all lesson objectives.

Research shows that when the SIOP model is appropriately used, diverse students, particularly English language learners', academic performance improves (Adger & Locke, 2000; Short & Echevarria, 1999).

### **Diversity Disposition**

Diversity disposition is measured by the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) (Henry, 1985). The Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory is a self-administered questionnaire designed to measure educator's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward children of culturally diverse backgrounds (Larke, 1990). The inventory's 28 item agree/disagree questions address general cultural awareness, the family, communication, assessments, and multicultural materials and methods. Participants completed the CDAI when they submitted their integrated unit, just prior to beginning their teaching residency.

### **Data/evidence**



### **Unit Rubric, SIOP, and CDAI scores**

As a group, PST in this study scored in the high range in Diversity Knowledge, mid-range in Diversity Skill, and mid-range in Diversity Disposition.

A simple T-test analysis suggests a relationship between Diversity Knowledge and Diversity Skills. These data however, do not suggest any relationship between Diversity Knowledge and Diversity Skill, and Diversity Dispositions.

### **Significance**

This research suggests a reconsideration of currently used dispositions may be necessary. Disposition measures are an important piece in the development and assessment of PST and are often used a gatekeeper to the profession. If the dispositions being used are not measuring cultural efficacy and consciousness, what are they measuring? Measures of disposition need to be analyzed for inherent cultural biases that may be excluding some diverse teacher candidates from the teaching profession and might be maintaining racial, cultural, and economic hegemony.

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Appendix A

Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I believe...					
1. ...my culture to be different from some of the children I teach.					
2. ...it is important to identify immediately the culture of the children I teach.					
3. ...I would prefer to work with children and parents whose cultures are similar to mine.					
4. ...I am uncomfortable in settings with people who speak non-standard English.					
5. ...I am uncomfortable in settings with people who exhibit values or beliefs different from my own.					
6. ...my interactions with parents should include social events and meeting in public places.					
7. ...I am sometimes surprised when members of certain ethnic groups contribute to particular school activities.					
8. ...the family's views of school and society should be included in the school's yearly planning.					
9. ...it is necessary to include on-going parent input in school planning.					
10. ...I sometimes experience frustration when conducting conferences with parents whose culture is different from my own.					
11. ...the solution to communication problems of certain ethnic groups is the child's own responsibility.					
12. ...English should be taught as a second language to non-English speaking children a regular part of the school curriculum.					
13. ...when correcting a child's spoken language, one should model without any further explanation.					
14. ...that there are times when the use of non-standard English should be ignored.					
15. ...in asking families how they wish to be referred to (e.g., Caucasian, White, or Anglo) at the beginning of our interaction.					
16. ... I should expect and accept the use of ethnic jokes or phrases by some students.					
17. ...that there are times when racial statements should be ignored.					

## Knowledge, Skills, and, Dispositions for Diversity

18. ...a child should be referred for testing if learning difficulties appear to be due to cultural differences and/or language.					
19. ...adaptations in standardized assessments to be questionable since they alter reliability and validity.					
20. ...translating a standardized achievement or intelligence test to a child's dominant language gives the child an added advantage and does not allow for comparison.					
21. ...parents know little about assessing their own children.					
22. ...the teaching of cultural customs and traditions is not the responsibility of the public school.					
23. ...it is my responsibility as a teacher to provide opportunities for children to share cultural differences.					
24. ...Individualized Education Programs meetings or other assessment meetings should be scheduled for the convenience of the parent.					
25. ...as a teacher I should make modifications to curriculum to accommodate children's cultures.					
26. ...the displays and frequently used materials in my classroom show at least three different culture group's customs.					
27. ...in a regular rotating schedule for job assignments in my classroom.					
28...one's knowledge of a particular culture should affect one's expectations of the children' performance.					